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**“COMMUNISM”
MUST DIE
FOR COMMUNISM
TO LIVE**

INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

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LET THE STATUES FALL

As they watch the statues tumble down, as they hear "Communism" declared officially dead, real communists can only feel heartened. For many decades now, they have been saying that this "Communism" is nothing but a capitalist monster. They have branded its usurpation of the names and slogans of the workers revolution, "the lie of the century". If this lie is now unmasked, if this "Communism" has died, so much the better!

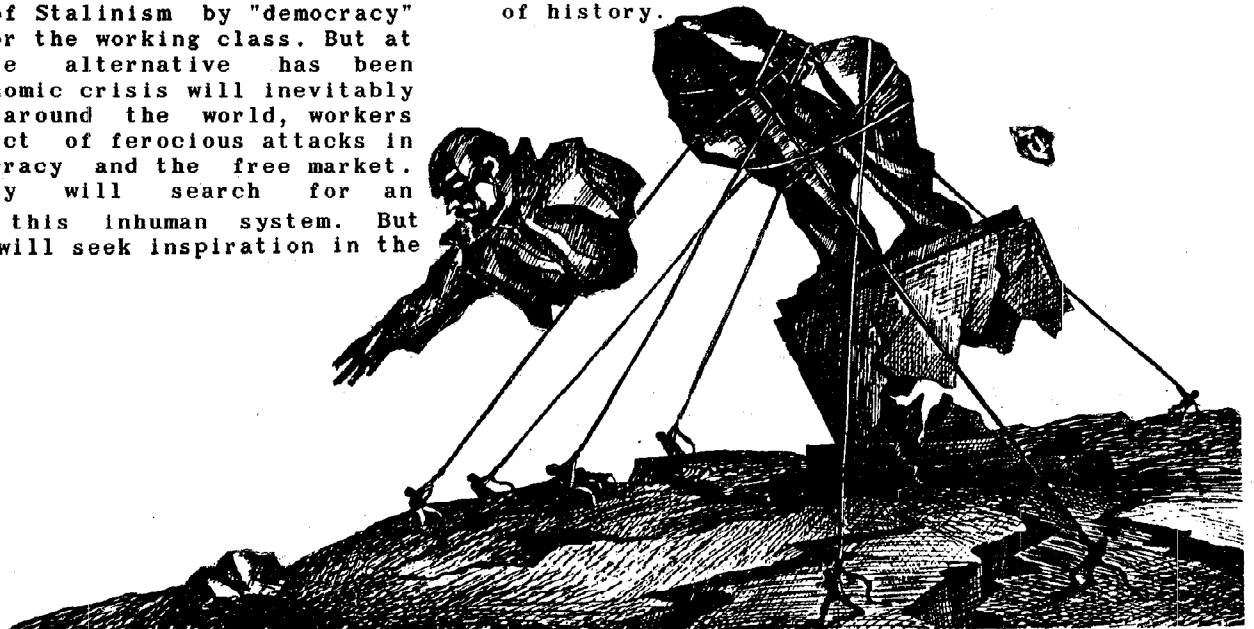
Real communists have no use for statues. They fight for a society that has rid itself from the specialists of power and the power of specialists. A society where nobody stands on a pedestal, where no men are exploited, subjugated or ruled by other men. "Communism" has nothing to do with this. Its origins lie not in the victory of working class revolution, but in its defeat. After the failure of workers revolution in other countries and its exhaustion in Russia itself, the Stalinist state assumed the role of agent of capitalist accumulation and imposed the most brutal exploitation on the working class, killing millions of workers in the process. The "communist" ideology was nothing but a cloak to hide the dagger of capitalist exploitation. But compared with the more sophisticated fabric of democracy and nationalist lies Western Capitalism has woven, it's always been a shoddy and transparent one. That's why, now that the crisis of the capitalist world economy has hit the Russian empire very hard, and a working class unbroken by earlier defeats is growing increasingly restless, it provides little protection for Russian capitalism. Therefore, it had to be replaced. In itself, the replacement of Stalinism by "democracy" is not a gain for the working class. But at least, a false alternative has been removed. The economic crisis will inevitably deepen and all around the world, workers will be the object of ferocious attacks in the name of democracy and the free market. Inevitably, they will search for an alternative to this inhuman system. But nobody anymore will seek inspiration in the

Russian, Chinese or Cuban "model". And hopefully, all those pseudo-communists who have defended these models over the years, will die of shame.

The removal of a false alternative, and of the myth that workers in the West and those in the East face a different system, should create room for the emergence of a genuine working class perspective. Revolutionaries, that is, those who didn't confound this perspective with the socialist rhetoric of the capitalist left and who never sacrificed class interests for the good of this or that nation, must be ready to answer the questions that will inevitably arise.

But first, they must destroy their own icons. The statues of "glorious leaders" they erected in their minds and theories, must tumble down too. They must rid themselves of the tendency to look for a model in the Bolchevik revolution, to think that class consciousness is a ready-made package of recipes from the past which the working class need only absorb and apply. They must cleanse themselves from the desire to become the leaders and organizers of the class struggle, which is the way in which they reproduce the social relation of capital in their own activity.

If they want to play a role in the revolutionary struggle to come, let them start by facing their own mistakes. Their own dogmatism, their own theoretical poverty, their own absorption of capitalist models for organizing themselves, their power-hungry dreams of becoming the directors of a class which has to get rid of all such specialists. If they are incapable of doing so, they will end up where Stalinism has landed: in the dustbin of history.



THE NEW CLOTHES OF RUSSIAN CAPITALISM

Now that the flag of old Russia is waving above the Kremlin, and the Stalinist party of the USSR has been disbanded, the process of political transformation of the ruling class in what used to be called the Eastern bloc seems complete. In hindsight, this process looks entirely logical. What we are witnessing is not "the end of history", "the final triumph of freedom over totalitarianism", or the random spreading of chaos resulting from society's "decomposition", as various ideologues maintain. Paradoxically, while the situation is used as much as possible to defile Marxism, only a Marxist analysis can explain why this process has happened now, why it occurs in the entire bloc and for what purpose.

As we have previously explained, the events in the East can only be understood in light of the deepening crisis of the capitalist world economy. As profits sagged and competition over the shrinking world market became more ferocious, the weakest capitals (those who, for historical reasons, remained the most backward) were the first to go under. That's why in the 70's and 80's, most of the so called "third world" fell in the abyss of economic depression. It was to be expected that the Eastern bloc, which in terms of capital development, stood somewhere in between the "third" and "first" world, would be next. Because the deepening economic crisis means more and more misery for more people, and because today's generation of workers hasn't been beaten into submissiveness, it inevitably leads to growing social crisis. And just as the economic crisis first undermines the weakest economies, the social crisis first erodes the weakest ideological defenses of capitalism. Even in the "third world", where the working class constitutes a lesser threat because of its smaller weight in society, the deepening of the crisis has led to the replacement of scores of military regimes and other overt dictatorships with more democratic forms of rule, better able to contain, divide and derail social unrest. In the Eastern bloc, the particular weakness of Stalinism as an ideological defense was not only due to the fact that nobody believed in it anymore, given the immense gap between its rhetorical pretenses and reality. It was also linked to the specific way in which capital accumulation was organized. The undisguised way in which the state directly maintained a control over all aspects of the economy meant that all resistance engendered by the worsening of economic conditions, was automatically directed against the same enemy: the central state. The absence of relatively

autonomous capitalist institutions of political control, such as "free" unions; opposition parties and media, means that once a struggle develops, there is nothing to sabotage it from within. In other words, the Stalinist structure and ideology left very little possibility to launch a successful attack on the working class by dividing it, as Western capital had done so well in the '80's.

The 80's was a period of major restructuring of capital in the West. Entire sectors of the economy were closed or cut to the bone, while a greatly enhanced mobility of capital increased capital-concentration in other areas of production. At the same time, social expenditures were slashed brutally and wage costs were driven down, while maintaining military expenditures at an insane pace. While spreading poverty and other forms of social misery to levels unseen since the '30's, Western capital greatly improved its competitive position and dashed the Kremlin's hopes to resolve its own economic problems through imperialist means. How did the West pull this off without provoking massive resistance? In the first place, through the strength of its ideological defenses:

- Democracy to foster the illusion that not the capitalist class rules, but "We, the people"; in other words, that we're all responsible for the mess we're in, but that we have the means to change it through elections, by putting our trust in the party of our choice, in "our" unions etc;

- The "free market" which masks the fact that the capitalist class and its state is the common enemy of all workers, dividing the workers in fights against a multitude of bosses which can push the workers with their backs against the wall with the simple threat of closing shop and moving their capital elsewhere;

- Nationalism which makes workers identify with their own exploiters in common opposition against an enemy beyond the border.

Given its economic problems, how badly did the ruling class in the East lack such tools! To the extent the events of the last years were a crisis of the Stalinist system as such, it was not caused by the waste endemic to this system (the waste of resources in the West is immensely larger) nor by the corruption and privileges of the ruling class (which pale in comparison with the riches accumulated by the ruling class in the West) but by its inherent limits on increasing the exploitation of "its" working class. What capital in the East needed was a way to close thousands of unprofitable factories and "restructure" numerous others, to throw millions of

accumulation). Therefore, the situation seemed to demand the impossible : a political suicide by the ruling class. No wonder thus, that the resistance from within the ruling class against the reforms was fierce. But while this resistance was going on and aggravated the economic situation, and while Gorbachev was trying to reserve space in the new order for a "reformed" Stalinist party, the transformation of the capitalist class in the USSR was quietly proceeding. The Stalinist party was being hollowed out from within; that's why after the failed coup, it could crack like an empty shell. Just look at who are the new entrepreneurs in the USSR : the vast majority held once important positions in the party ; that's how they got their starting capital. Look at the new democrats, the stars of the new political configuration, the leaders of the republics : most of them used to be party-bosses. Clearly, the ruling class in the Russian empire hasn't committed suicide !

Left behind in the shell are the fence-sitters (they still have time to turn their coats) those too old or rigid to adapt, those too dim-witted to see the writing on the wall. From their ranks came the organizers of a coup without program, without strategy beyond taking power.

The incredible clumsiness of the coup (which led one witty observer to call it "the Keystone coup") might find a partial explanation in this. The question of whether the plotters grossly misjudged the balance of forces or were misled by others into such a miscalculation is intriguing but ultimately irrelevant. The coup revealed to what degree the balance of forces within the capitalist class had already shifted in favor of the reformers. The conservatives were swimming against the tide.

The stalemate in the power struggle within workers on the streets and let them rot in their misery ; to make the remaining ones produce more ; to stop social expenditures like state-subsidies for basic necessities and let prices shoot upwards ; to have those who resist such things face not one enemy, the state with its party and police, but a multitude of bosses and different administrations which can always point the finger at someone else ; to have "free" media and unions and politicians reminding the discontented of their duty to respect democratic law and their right to vote for whom they please and pointing out to them that they have as much right as anybody else to try their entrepreneurial luck on the free market.

It was in the first place to acquire this ability that capitalism in the East underwent a major political transformation. But in the USSR itself, this adaptation was bound to be extremely difficult. Unlike the Eastern European satellites, for roughly 70 years the Stalinist party and the capitalist class had been almost entirely the same thing in the Russian empire (and even before, in Tsarist time, the state was by far the main agent of capitalist



the ruling class could not continue for much longer. With a projected fall in the GNP of 30 %, a harvest 25 % smaller than last year and runaway inflation, the threat of social unrest loomed very large indeed. The power struggle threatened to render the capitalist class incapable of facing the danger. A clash was inevitable.

As we noted in IP 18 (p 10), the conservatives "were utterly incapable of coming up with an alternative program to face the crisis". And when earlier this year, their power seemed to be rising, we wrote that "the conditions for a "Chilean" solution to the crisis of Russian capital does not now exist, because of the mounting tide of class struggle" (IP 19, p 17). In november last year, we stated that, in the interests of the capitalist class, the Yeltsin camp had to come to power (IP 18, p 12). But we did not realize that the balance of forces had already decisively changed and that the capitalist class could do without the Stalinist party. You might say that we underestimated the Russian capitalist class. The failed coup revealed and furthered the weakness of the conservatives. The dynamic unleashed was not unlike the one set in motion by Kornilov, the reactionary general who tried to grab power in august 1917. In both cases, the apparent target was a centrist government : Kerensky then, Gorbachev now. In both cases, the failure of

the coup did not reinforce these "constitutional" leaders, but the forces which were the real targets of the coup. The big difference, of course, is that in 1917 these forces were the organizations of the working class, which defeated the coup; while in 1991 they were the reformist wing of the ruling class and the coup was defeated because, when forced to choose sides, the bulk of the capitalist class, including its army, lined up behind the reformers.

THE LIE OF DEMOCRACY

All the media and politicians, in the West as well as in the East, have celebrated the failure of the coup as a great victory for democracy. The people, so they say, have defeated the tanks, etc. It's a transparent lie. In Beijing in '89, millions of people demonstrated in the streets. Mass strikes went on in the capital, Shanghai and other big cities. This didn't prevent the tanks from crushing the protests, because the vast majority of the capitalist class in China closed ranks behind the hardliners, and the workers in China lacked the consciousness and the weight in society to organize their autonomous class-based resistance. And neither did the bloodbath prevent the democratic rulers of the West from continuing their good relations with the butchers of Beijing. In Moscow, on the other hand, scarcely 1 % of the population came to the streets against the hardliners. Despite some scattered strikes, Yeltsin's call for a general strike went largely unheeded. Nor was there any show of support for the coup. By and large, the workers of Russia decided that this was not their fight. How right they were. They will need their energies to fight on their own class terrain, for their own class interests. The events showed clearly that the coup collapsed because of lack of support from the capitalist class itself, especially its military-security apparatus.

Before the coup, the military hierarchy was very much divided. As the instrument of Russian imperialism, the army was alarmed about the loss of Eastern Europe and the specter of secessions, which the coup-organizers hoped to prevent. On the other hand, imperialism depends on a strong economic base and on the political capacity to mobilize society behind a war effort. Both aspects imply the need to increase the exploitation of the working class and to break its resistance. On that score, the hardliners had nothing to offer. So when the events forced them to get off the fence, the generals did not follow the coup-plotters. And neither did the army scatter or fall apart. It kept its cohesion and saved its class from itself.

Democracy did not defeat the coup, but as an ideological weapon it was tremendously reinforced by its failure, which created the opportunity for a veritable counter-coup by the reformers. No doubt this strength will be used, along with nationalism, whose mystificatory power is much greater now thanks to the devolution of power to the

republics, to launch brutal attacks against the working class. In the name of democracy and nationalism, workers will be thrown on the streets and prices will shoot through the roof. And when workers fight back, they will be accused of abusing the new "freedom" they were granted.

The democracy that's taking shape in Russia and the other republics will be of a crude variation, as shown by the first measures taken by the new regime: prohibition of a party, dissolution of the elected congress, concentration of power in a small state council which will try to rule by decree. In some of the republics, where petty despots have managed to get control over the state machine, the democracy will be even more of a sham. The first thing they all do is beef up their repressive apparatus, in the name of the need for a national army.

No doubt elections and other democratic tools will be used in the Russian empire, to give the new regime credibility and to derail unrest. But the empire is economically too weak and is lacking too much in cohesion and tradition, to function like the democratic regimes in Western Europe or North America.

Let us be clear that in those countries too, democracy is a facade for the totalitarian rule of capitalism. When push comes to shove, they can be just as brutal and ruthless as any other capitalist state. But they possess much more sophisticated mechanisms to prevent that push does come to shove. Democracy in Western Europe and North America means an intricate web of links between all institutions of capitalist society which allows a specialized division of labor between all the different political instruments of the ruling class. For such a web to exist, these institutions must have grown with capitalism itself and its economic base must have reached a stage of development Marxists have called "the real domination of capital", which allows the capitalist state to absorb all aspects of civil life in one unified totalitarian whole. In the Russian empire, we will see a much more overtly authoritarian, populist style of democracy and a less unified ruling class.

THE FATE OF THE UNION

One of the reasons why Stalinism survived so long in the USSR is that it was, together with the military-security apparatus, the glue that held the empire together. The dynamic unleashed by its collapse, as well as the need to divide the working class with nationalism, will therefore further weaken the cohesion of the empire. Already the Baltic states have successfully seceded and

it is not impossible that others will follow. That would not necessarily be a disaster for Russian capital. As we emphasized before the August-events in IP 19 (p 17), the republics most likely to secede account for only an infinitesimal share of the total economy of the union, and their independence would not free them from economic and military dependence on Moscow.

But the new configuration which is taking shape, will not be a stable one. While capital benefits from the loosening of ties between the republics, because of the use of nationalism this makes possible, the multiplication of often contradictory laws and measures and possibly currencies will tend to aggravate the economic problems. And the clash between centralizing and centrifugal forces within the ruling class will continue. It will force Russian capitalism to forget any imperialist plans for the time being. But it wouldn't be in its interests to reassert these in the short term anyway. In order to deal with its catastrophic economic situation, it must try to attract Western aid and investment and integrate itself more into the world economy, goals for which it is now better positioned than before the coup. The lack of development of political organs to fill in the gap created by the demise of Stalinism is another factor contributing to political instability in the short term. Nevertheless, we can expect the Russian capitalist class to try to consolidate its power, first within its own republic, then reasserting its domination over the other republics.

As the deepening of the crisis of the world economy will doom its attempts to solve its economic problems, sooner or later, imperialism will emerge again as the only way to break the economic impasse. Global crisis leads capitalism to global war, and global war in this era can only be fought by military blocs. For a number of reasons (see the article on imperialism in the '90's in this issue) Russia will play the major role in any alliance which might challenge US-world domination.

But before it can even think of such designs, Russian capital must try to reorder

its economic house and defeat "its" working class. It was for these goals that the reforms were undertaken in the first place. For the working class, not just in Russia but worldwide, a new chapter begins. The coming period will be marked by the acceleration of the attacks on its living and working conditions, and everywhere these attacks will be packaged in democratic propaganda. Russian workers have so far reacted quite coolly to the delights of democracy and the free market. They will not be easily derailed from the struggle for their own interests. But the danger exists that a series of partial defeats, division and ideological confusion will weaken the will to resist of our class in Russia; that Yeltsin, as a Russian Allende, will prepare the way for a Russian Pinochet.

Much will depend on the workers in the West, on the question whether they, after years of relative passivity, will clarify in the heat of the struggle the international unity of the working class. The struggle of workers in East and West can no longer be portrayed as "different", because of supposedly different systems. Nor will "the Russian model" ever again be held up as the alternative for Western capitalism. There exists more room today for recognition by workers of different countries and continents that they're all in the same boat. That the problems are global and the solution too. Inevitably, as the crisis intensifies, workers will seek an alternative to what exists. We revolutionaries must answer the questions that will arise in our class, drawing on its past and present experiences, formulating clearly the consciousness which is implicitly there, with human language and not with the slogans of yesteryear. Sander (9/11/91)

THE REVOLUTIONARY MILIEU

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It seems clear that without this, any functioning past the level of a circle of close friends would be impossible. But there are certainly a lot of misunderstandings left on all sides of this question.

The CBG wonders aloud whether IP is afraid that CBG comrades will constitute "a group within a group" if they join IP. Many of our comrades have never even seen most of the CBG comrades and more important, have no idea of what they think as individuals with one or two exceptions, so we're not sure what the answer to that question is. But if we don't share a common commitment to the same tasks, it's sure that they will be a group within a group.

It seems clear to us that immediate regroupment between the CBG and IP would be premature. There are still too many issues left unresolved or misunderstood. We have not always been able to explain our idea of "going beyond the platform" clearly. Perhaps that is why we are finding it so hard to do. More time, more written contributions, more certainty

that we share a common orientation for future work...this is what is needed.

We are happy with how far we and the CBG have come together up to now and we are optimistic about future discussions. We can only hope that the CBG and others feel the same.

In a world where "marxism" has become a laughingstock for the media, where we are treated to the spectacle of Gorbachev defending Lenin against Stalin, revolutionaries (those who cannot be fooled by dogmatism and sterility) will have to see the need to renew theory or they will drop out, demoralized or bitter. The demise of stalinism will loosen the stalinist hold on whatever remaining sectors of the western or eastern working class it still spoke to. The long agony of counter-revolutionary ideology accelerates and the conditions of the working class east and west have come to resemble each other more and more as the world crisis develops. There are still grave obstacles to working class consciousness but at least the circle is narrowing.

J.A.

Fourth Conference of Internationalist Perspective

At the beginning of the Summer, our Fraction held its fourth international conference. Also invited to this conference was a delegation from the "Communist Bulletin Group" of Great Britain, with which -- as a result of prior discussions and meetings -- we share agreement on basic questions of principle.

This conference had a particular importance because of a world situation characterized by a wave of upheavals affecting the social, political and economic life of capitalist society in the East, where Stalinism definitively collapsed. For three days, we raised, discussed and deepened our understanding of the world crisis of capitalism, of the balance of forces between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and the present course of imperialism. In particular, we insisted on the importance of the events in the East, where the capitalist crisis has so violently shaken the very foundations of society. This new reality led us to recognize the insufficiency of our prior analyses, which in important respects remained imprisoned by outdated stereotypes. We responded to the challenge of grasping the meaning of events for which no historical precedent existed, and of integrating them into our general framework for understanding the reality of capitalism in this epoch.

The report on the international situation emphasized the ever deepening nature of the capitalist crisis, illustrated by the violent breakdown in the East, and by a wave of massive new layoffs in the giant enterprises of the West. We affirmed that there would be no let up in the crisis, and that the world economy would plunge deeper on its catastrophic course -- a descent that no amount of restructuring could prevent.

With respect to inter-imperialist conflicts, we have been immune to the tranquilizing effects of the reigning pacifist discourse. The imperialist equilibrium arising from the Yalta Conference in 1945 has ceased to exist. However, the same cannot be said for imperialist antagonisms, which are now in the midst of a process of recomposition. Given the extreme gravity of the crisis of accumulation, there can be no new world order based on universal peace, no matter how zealously pushed by the Pope, George Bush and other con artists trafficking in pacifist snake oil. On the contrary, new imperialist rivalries are being reawakened, as can be seen in the civil war between Serbs and Croats in Yugoslavia which is destabilizing the whole of the Balkans and transforming old military alliances in the region. For us, the era of "super-imperialism" has not come; indeed, will never come. The present crisis will only make the imperialist contradictions between states more acute. Instead of a capitalism without

crisis or conflict, the chaos of economic crisis is growing; instead of "perpetual peace", there is permanent tension between the principal imperialisms.

Our conference was held after the Gulf war. Our two leaflets, which were widely distributed, had denounced the barbarism of the massacres and took a clear position against all of the imperialist brigands involved in the conflict. Our last leaflet called on the workers to refuse to kill their class brothers; on the soldiers on both sides to refuse to fight.

Our conference took place at the height of the anti-communist campaign through which the capitalist class has sought to pulverize the class consciousness of the proletariat. In every language, the mass media proclaims the death of "communism", knocked out by democracy. For us, that has been the occasion to reaffirm the basic Marxist understanding of social reality, while recognizing that the ruling class has demonstrated that it is not at the end of its ideological rope, that it still retains the capacity -- at the present time -- to anesthetize its class adversary. On the perspectives for class struggle, the report pointed out the enormous difficulty that the proletariat has in affirming its own social project: communism. We acknowledged that we had expected too much from the proletariat in the short run. Nonetheless, we affirmed that if the proletariat has been diverted from its own class terrain by corporatism, nationalism and anti-communism, this situation will not last indefinitely.

The events of the past few years have also accelerated the crisis in the revolutionary political milieu. Our Fraction cannot fail to be a part of the effort to overcome this condition. We must continue to take the initiative in furthering an ongoing confrontation of positions between the different groups in the political milieu. We have demonstrated in our praxis a commitment to an overcoming of sectarianism. That effort must now be intensified, because the milieu today is being buffeted by events, sinking into a political autism, and even repudiating certain points of principle basic to a Marxist understanding under the sway of conjunctural occurrences.

The conference also raised the issue of the recomposition of the working class, a problem to which we intend to devote a great deal of our theoretical resources. In the face of the economic crisis, a profound restructuration of capitalism has occurred, bringing about a recomposition of the proletariat. This is a phenomenon that Marxists absolutely must comprehend, even as they understand that such a restructuration

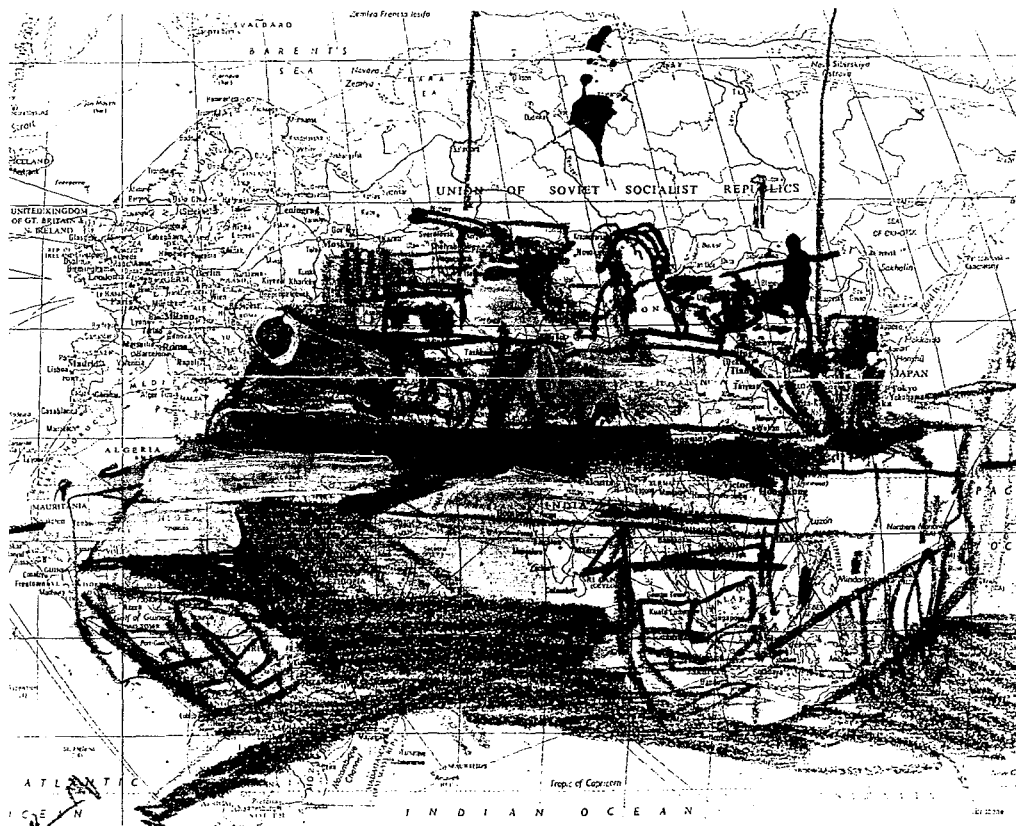
can in no way make possible a resolution of the crisis of capitalism.

We publish below two texts presented and adopted as reports to our conference, which treat key aspects of the present world situation: new elements on the inter-imperialist scene on the one hand, and the present state of the class struggle and its historic perspective on the other. These

texts attempt not only to make more precise and to deepen our fundamental orientation on these questions, but also to provide answers to a series of questions recently provoked by developments themselves: specifically, the prospects for a crumbling of the American bloc, and the implications of the recomposition of the working class.

THE EVOLUTION OF INTER-IMPERIALIST TENSIONS

An orientation for the 1990's



No Marxist analysis of inter-imperialist antagonisms can be complete without a thorough consideration of the dialectical interconnections between the unfolding of the economic crisis, the development of the class struggle, and the inter-imperialist tensions between capitalist states. Abstracting from the totality within which inter-imperialist tensions are played out is extremely risky, and is justified only as a preliminary step in the development of a Marxist analysis of the international situation. With this warning in mind, we want to briefly examine four key aspects of inter-imperialist antagonisms: 1) the situation of the American bloc in the aftermath of the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, and as a result of the Gulf war; 2) the situation of Russian imperialism in the

wake of the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and COMECON; 3) the possibilities for the crumbling (effritement) of the American bloc in the coming period; 4) the prospects for inter-imperialist wars in the "Third World", wars which are not basically proxy conflicts between the dominant imperialist blocs (as has been the case since 1945).

In a real sense, American imperialism is at its zenith today. This must not be understood in terms of any fundamental strength, or capacity to retain its present position of global hegemony. Rather, it must be understood to mean simply that American imperialism is unlikely to ever again enjoy a position of power in the world as great as it now has. (In a sense, the present position of American imperialism -- strictly in terms

of its position on the inter-imperialist chessboard -- is comparable to the point reached by British imperialism in 1919: on the surface, the most powerful imperialist state in the world, with an empire at the height of its territorial extent, and no significant challenge on the horizon; in fact, an imperialism that was seriously overextended economically, militarily and politically in terms of its real power, and because of that, subject to new and threatening challenges in the period to come.)

On the continent of Europe, the American bloc has never been stronger than it is today. Without having had to fire a shot, it has, in effect, forced Russian imperialism to move its forces from the heart of Germany, a few days march from the industrial heart of Western Europe, to the frontiers of the "Soviet Union". German troops, as part of NATO, will now move up to the Oder/Neisse line. The new Polish, Czech and Hungarian regimes have not only sought admission to the EEC, but have indicated a desire to become a part of NATO. For its part, NATO appears to have already offered assurances that no Russian move back into Central and Eastern Europe will be tolerated. Indeed, one role for the projected NATO rapid deployment force would be to defend the countries bordering on Russia, to act as a possible "trip wire" in a period of tension, thereby deterring the Russians. In effect, the events of the past two years have constituted a veritable revocation of the Yalta treaty!

Beyond its impact on the Middle East, the Gulf war permitted the American bloc to test its weapons against those of its potential Russian adversary. Admittedly, the "test" was unfair: state of the art NATO equipment, operated by American, British and French troops was pitted against second line Russian equipment operated by Iraqi troops. Nonetheless, the war permitted both NATO and the Russians to have a glimpse of what the battlefield in Europe would look like -- and it was a picture that could not fail to alarm the Russians! Coming on top of its geopolitical reverses in Europe, the Gulf war pointed up the extent of Russian military inferiority to its NATO adversary.

In the Middle East itself, Russia is now without a proxy: Syria enthusiastically joined the American bloc in its assault on Iraq, and has forged new links with both the Saudi's and Washington; Iraq has been virtually destroyed, and into the bargain sees Moscow as having betrayed it. American, British and French forces will -- for the first time in years -- have a string of military bases on the Arabian peninsula, thereby allowing them to directly play the role of gendarme in the region (a role left vacant by the fall of the Shah of Iran).

This, of course, does not mean a Pax Americana in the Middle East. For that, a durable resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and of the Palestinian problem, would be necessary -- and that remains a

distant objective. However, the war, and the influx of Russian Jews into Israel, have both conspired to advance American aims in this respect: The war has solidified American influence with the Arab regimes, while weakening the hardline "rejectionist front" based in Baghdad, and the PLO; the influx of Russian Jews has made Israel more economically dependent on Washington, without whose aid these immigrants cannot be absorbed, thereby increasing Washington's leverage over Israel. Whether this translates into real steps towards lancing the Palestinian abcess remains to be seen; but the conditions for such steps over the medium term have probably never been better.

In Africa, where Russian imperialism attempted to challenge the American bloc in the late 1960's and 1970's, the last pro-Russian regimes have just been eliminated. In Ethiopia, the fall of Mengistu, and the entry of the rebels into Addis Ababa, brokered by Washington, marks the fall of the last Russian bastion in East Africa; the settlement between the Luanda regime and Jonas Savimbi's pro-Western rebels, putting an end to Angola's long civil war, marks the end of Moscow's influence in South West Africa. Perhaps for the first time since decolonization began in the 1950's, Africa is, for the moment, under the unchallenged hegemony of the American bloc.

In Asia too, the Russian challenge to the West is rapidly fading. The Russian withdrawal from Afghanistan, Moscow's loss of influence in India, the withdrawal of the Vietnamese -- as Russian proxies -- from Kampuchea, and the tentative efforts of Vietnam itself to turn from Russia to the West, are so many signs of the shift in the imperialist balance of power in favor of the West on the continent of Asia.

In America's own backyard, in the Western hemisphere, one must go back to the 1950's to find a period when Washington's control was as pervasive as it is today. The elimination of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, and its replacement by a regime "made in Washington", the prospects for a resolution of the civil war in El Salvador, with its Pentagon-backed regime intact, and the overthrow of Noriega in Panama, have produced a Pax Americana in Central America. Events in Russia have completely isolated the Castro regime in Cuba, leaving it largely bereft of the aid from Moscow that has kept it afloat, even while it confronts a devastating economic crisis and the mounting threat of social upheaval. While Cuba's geographical isolation, and the "safety valve" of emigration to the US for many thousands of its people each year (who would otherwise constitute a potential challenge to Castro) reduces the chances of a speedy overthrow of one of the world's last Stalinist regimes, the prospect over the medium term is such that the regime in Havana is unlikely to outlast its founder. Washington, for its part, is busily preparing the politico-economic terrain for the post-Castro era, as it fine tunes its links

within the exile community of Miami. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the likelihood of Mexico becoming part of a North American free trade zone (with the US and Canada), and the prospect of its eventual extension to the whole of the hemisphere (which would create the world's largest free trade bloc) is but one more sign of the power of American imperialism -- once again in abstraction from the economic crisis and the class struggle, simply in terms of inter-imperialist competition -- as the century draws to a close.

In light of the above, it is tempting to conclude -- as has the ICC for example -- that Russia is no longer a "player", a factor, on the inter-imperialist chessboard. Such a conclusion, however, would be a serious mistake. Having insisted for so long on the extent of Russia's reverses vis a vis the West, it may seem strange to now argue against the view that Russia has ceased to exist as an imperialist power. Yet there is no contradiction in arguing that Russia has been gravely weakened in its struggle with the American bloc, and in asserting that for the foreseeable future it is the only power that can challenge the US on a global scale.

Russia is still the only state that has a nuclear arsenal, an air force, and a navy, that can threaten the US. It remains the second military power in the world. The present impotence of the Russian capitalist class faced with an ever deepening economic crisis for which it has no coherent response, and social turmoil that it cannot control, is a situation that is inherently unstable. Either the crisis and social upheavals will spiral out of control and threaten capitalist class rule or the capitalist class will find the means to control the working class, and the mass of the population, and implement a coherent economic program. In the first case, inter-imperialist antagonisms will recede on a global scale; in the second case, a capitalist class in control of Russia (even one significantly reduced in size by the secession of several republics), and having even temporarily regained control over the working class, will once again begin to seriously pursue its imperialist ambitions. And it will dispose of a not inconsiderable base from which to launch new politico-military initiatives: its powerful military, its continental scale, its wealth of raw materials, a military-industrial sector of enormous weight. The same underlying factors which enabled Stalinist Russia in the course of less than fifteen years (1928 - 1941) to move from a third class power to a major imperialist state, will be operative in the period to come -- provided the Russian capitalist class can assert its authority over the country and the workers. It is these elements that should give us pause when we hear the claim that Russia has simply ceased to exist as an imperialist state. Such claims are based on taking a punctual situation for a durable condition, and ignore the basic socio-economic and politico-military factors that have propelled Russian expansion throughout the capitalist epoch.

The very incapacity of Russian imperialism today has for the moment at least significantly weakened one of the key elements that has bound Western Europe and Japan to the US since 1945: the threat of Russian expansion. When to that is added the economic strength of Germany and Japan, which over the past decade have become major trade and financial rivals of the US, it would seem reasonable to conclude that the American bloc is crumbling, or that such an outcome is inevitable in the near future. That is the basis for the revival of the theory of the effritement des blocs, first articulated in the 1970's. Are we now to conclude that the perspectives of the PIC were indeed a prophecy come true? We think not. And that for three reasons.

In the first place, such a view is tainted with a crude economic determinism. It assumes that the most powerful economies are fated to engage in a military-political struggle. This was the view of Trotsky in 1924, when surveying the international situation, he concluded that the two dominant economic powers -- Britain and the US -- would soon be embroiled in a war (c.f. Whither England?). In fact, the two dominant economic powers became allies and faced the political-military challenge of Germany and Japan, each far weaker than either of its two rivals. The fact that Germany and Japan are the main economic rivals of the US today in no way means that they will necessarily become its imperialist rivals. A renewed military challenge from Russia is at least as likely to drive them into the arms of Washington as it is to embolden them to militarily confront it on their own; and such a challenge remains the greatest likelihood over the medium term -- all the more so as the Russian capitalist class lacks the resources to mount an economic challenge to its competitors, and with its back against the wall, will ultimately have to take the military route or face extinction.

In the second place, it is difficult to conceive of Germany and Japan mounting a serious political-military challenge to America without first provoking a massive reaction in Europe and the Pacific. Already, the spectre of a united Germany has reinforced the traditional ties between British and American imperialism; the French as well have become even more Atlanticist. The Poles and Czechs have sought to assure themselves support in Washington, London and Paris (Walesa wants German investment, but even more he wants Anglo-American guarantees). Despite Germany's economic power, it is difficult to conceive of Berlin forging a New Order without provoking a reaction that will lead both Western and Central Europe to seek closer ties with the US, thereby upsetting its designs. The same is true in the Pacific, where the least sign of Japanese militarism provokes an immediate response in China, Taiwan, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines. The present wave of anti-Japanese sentiment in Australia in reaction to Japanese economic, not military-political, pressure is significant

in this regard. Any serious effort by Berlin or Tokyo to translate their economic power into military power would provoke a reaction by their neighbors that would immediately strengthen the US in terms of consolidating its bloc -- politically, militarily and economically.

When we consider the dependence of both Germany and Japan on imported raw materials and foreign markets to sustain their economic dynamism, without which a military buildup would be extremely difficult, and when we consider how fragile are those sources of raw materials and foreign markets, largely under US control, the obstacles to such a course of action by Germany and Japan become clear. This is not to say that such an eventuality can be ruled out; it can't. Moreover, tensions between Germany and Japan on the one side, and the US on the other, as the bloc adjusts to the new economic balance between Berlin, Tokyo and Washington are as inevitable as they will be fractious. However, that is a different matter than concluding that a military challenge to the US by Germany and/or Japan is on the agenda.

In the third place, the perspective of a crumbling of the American bloc ignores the whole development of state capitalism in the advanced countries of the West since 1945, the development of a real economic bloc (and not just a political-military alliance between capitalist states), involving the construction of supra-state institutions, such as the World Bank, the IMF, the GATT, etc. which -- while dominated by Washington -- are genuine bloc institutions wielding real economic power. The states of the American or Western bloc have become economically dependent on the functioning of these institutions, and the network of trade and financial links they have forged. Any disruption of this system, of the bloc, would have momentous consequences for the country that initiated it. Thus, for example, Japan would risk not merely its biggest market (the US), and sources of raw materials, but also -- and perhaps most importantly -- its financial stability based on its massive investments in the US and its creditor status. In a real sense, these constitute so many bonds, so many chains of gold, that the dominant factions of the capitalist class in Berlin and Tokyo would not lightly break; bonds which tie them to the American bloc. It is one thing to anticipate a shift in the relative balance between Germany, Japan and the US within the framework of the Western bloc, a shift that increases the weight of Berlin and Tokyo; it is quite another to anticipate a German or Japanese regime that would decide to dismantle that bloc. These are some of the factors that must be considered when revolutionaries raise the prospect of a crumbling of the American bloc.

The only scenario involving a crumbling of the American bloc that seems conceivable -- though not likely -- at this time, is the prospect of an alliance that links the industrial power of Germany and/or Japan and the military power of Russia. This is certainly an old dream of factions of both

the German and Russian ruling classes, and would to a certain degree compensate for the economic losses attendant on the breakup of the bloc with significant military gains. It is, however, subject to all the caveats enumerated above, as well as to the danger that in such an "alliance" it will be Russia with its nuclear weapons and military arsenal that will call the shots.

One effect of the changes in the imperialist balance of power that is very likely to characterize the international situation in the future, is the prospect of inter-imperialist conflicts in the "Third World" that are not basically proxy wars between the dominant imperialism's, nor easily restrained by them. Just because such conflicts may not directly concern the vital interests of a major imperialism (as Iraq's invasion of Kuwait concerned the US), the dominant powers may lack the interest or wherewithal to intervene in them, let alone contain or stop them. Thus, we may well see a veritable orgy of barbarism in the Third World, carried on the winds of ethnic or religious fanaticism, that will be an anticipation of what capitalism has in store for the advanced countries if the working class cannot eliminate it first. The ferocity of the warfare between Azeris and Armenians, between Georgians and Ossetians in the Caucasus, or between Tamils and Singhalese in Sri Lanka, are so many indications of the capitalist future that beckons to us from the twenty first century. Even if war between the dominant powers is not immediately on the agenda, both because the working class of the capitalist metropolises cannot yet be mobilized for that kind of conflict, and because -- for the moment -- American imperialism faces no serious challenge to its military hegemony, the upsurge of nationalism, the ideology par excellence of state capitalism, is the harbinger of WAR(S)!



June 1991

THE HISTORIC RESPONSABILITIES OF THE WORKING CLASS

The scope of the military means deployed in the Gulf war, and of the imperialist alliances which undergirded it, raise many questions about the global social framework that made the war possible. For those of us who have always analyzed social dynamics within the context of an "historic course", it must be this very concept that must be reexamined and probably deepened. But for most of the revolutionary milieu, the concept of an "historic course" seems as abstruse as ever. Several groups have commented about it in light of recent events, thereby revealing their general conception of the current period.

SOME REACTIONS IN THE REVOLUTIONARY MILIEU

1) According to some, the very fact that a war such as the one in the Gulf occurs shows once again that we are historically still in a period of counter-revolution -- a period that began in the '20's with the crushing of the revolutionary wave that followed the end of World War One. In this view, the Gulf war was but one more proof of the historic defeat from which the working class has never recovered. For these groups, the workers' struggles of the last twenty years reveal no development of class consciousness. They see them as strictly "economic" conflicts which in no way threatened the "social peace" that capitalism requires.

For the more extreme adherents of this position, the Gulf war could even constitute the prelude to a Third World War. Mouvement Communiste, for instance, compares the Gulf war to the Spanish civil war, as a military dress rehearsal. A world war is for them always a possibility, even if the deepening of the crisis points to serious class conflicts in the future.

2) For the ICC, the Gulf war is no reason to take a critical look at its own predictions, no matter how wrong they have proven to be. It recognizes that the working class has become more passive since '88, but its short term perspective remains that the worsening of economic conditions will push the class to ever more massive and decisive confrontations. According to the ICC, the collapse of the Eastern bloc and the chaos and mystifications that this has produced are the only reason for the present confusion of the working class.

As we can see, there are very divergent

appreciations of the current period. On the one hand, there's the rejection of the idea that a new historic course began at the end of the '60's. On the other hand, the defense of this idea is accompanied by a blindness to the social dynamic of the past ten years. The way that these problems are tackled reflects a real confusion and lack of method in analyzing the balance of forces between the fundamental social classes in capitalism. Therefore, it is first necessary to return to the concept of an "historic course" and then to examine the present situation.

THE CONCEPT OF THE HISTORIC COURSE

A little over ten years ago a discussion began through the impetus of the ICC (see International Review # 18) on whether or not it is possible and necessary to define a general historic course, which could only change under certain determinate conditions. The concept of an historic course pertains to the possibility and necessity to define a general TREND within the overall social dynamic; a trend that is itself produced by the historic balance of forces between the capitalist class and the working class.

Today, we must ask ourselves two questions:

-- Is the concept of an historic course still valid? Can we use it to explain the Gulf war among others?

-- Have we correctly utilized this concept? What has the history of the past ten years taught us that will allow us to deepen it?

During those ten years, the rest of the revolutionary milieu remained extremely sceptical about the way in which we explained the opening of a new historic course since the end of the '60's. We had at that time advanced the following view: the end of the '60's had opened a new historic period in the life of capitalism, in which its crisis would lay bare its basic contradictions; this crisis would place the capitalists and the workers on two directly antagonistic tracks, even if this would not at each moment assert itself in a clear and open fashion. On the one hand, the capitalist class would be led by the logic of its own class interests towards a Third World War (at the time, it seemed evident that such a war could only be fought between the US and the USSR, though the perspective itself was not dependent on the configuration of existing blocs, which

could always change). On the other hand, against this tendency, the working class would be led to affirm its revolutionary essence: the deepening crisis of capitalism would erode and shatter the proletariat's living and working conditions and impel it -- through the extension of its defensive struggles -- to become a powerful social lever capable of overthrowing the very foundations of capitalist society. By taking that route, the working class would undermine the objective and subjective conditions necessary for world war. Thus, the working class had come out of a dark period of counter-revolution that had lasted for decades, and a favorable historic course had begun. This period was seen, not as one of immediate revolution, but rather one of class confrontations which would ultimately become decisive. The method underlying this perspective consisted of two elements. First, distinguishing the antagonistic tracks characteristic of the two historic social classes generated by the different phases of the capitalist dynamic, and specifically the contradictory movement produced since the end of the '60's. Second, not examining periods of passivity or struggle on the part of the working class in themselves, but rather inserting them in a global framework.

THE CURRENT DISAGREEMENTS IN THE REVOLUTIONARY MILIEU OVER THE HISTORIC COURSE

Amidst the scepticism within the milieu concerning the concept of an historic course, two basic divergences can be seen. First, on the very nature of the crisis opened at the end of the '60's. Second, on the way in which class consciousness develops.

The Crisis

More and more we are confronted with the idea that the crisis which has now lasted for more than twenty years is not yet a fundamental crisis of capitalism, but simply a moment in the adaptation of capitalism to its cyclical crises. In this view, the death crisis will be seen in an automatic breakdown, one that is brutal and general, which is yet to come. Only at such a point will the objective framework for a proletarian upheaval with a revolutionary perspective exist.

This conception is profoundly mistaken. Of course capitalism is now undergoing a process of restructuring and modernization, but that is not an expression of the vitality of a healthy economic system in full expansion, but rather is inscribed within a general context dominated by a continuous narrowing of its possibilities for expansion. But we must also acknowledge that we ourselves may have contributed to the development of this mistaken view by portraying capitalism as having already completely run out of steam, and a capitalist class as at the end of its tether. Indeed, we underestimated the means at the disposal of the capitalist class, the means to find ways to survive and to phase in the crisis (through the accumulation of debt, creating a fictitious demand, etc.); means which will be

available AS LONG AS THE WORKING CLASS ITSELF DOES NOT PUT AN END TO THE CAPITALIST MODE OF PRODUCTION. On the other hand, the idea that capitalism will suddenly collapse in the future, mechanically generating a class conscious proletariat, allows its adherents the luxury of avoiding any examination of the real difficulties encountered by the working class over the past twenty years, since nothing was possible anyway.

In general it's a big mistake to start from the postulate that capitalism will be undone by its own limits. Not only is there nothing that allows us to conclude that capitalism will cease to exist by itself, but in addition, such a theoretical approach involves denying that the process of collapse has long begun, and denying that it is the task of the working class itself -- through its seizure of social and political power -- to establish the limit to capitalism's existence.

Class Consciousness

Basically, what is at stake here is the whole question of the revolutionary nature of the working class. By the development of its resistance against the increase in its exploitation, the working class implicitly attempts to break the commodity logic, and the logic of war, of capital. Its class activity makes the satisfaction of human needs -- and in the long run communism -- its priority; and this against the whole frenetic process of the valorization of capital. We must of course show how such a threshold was reached historically. The idea of an historic course favorable to the working class at the end of the '60's was based on a number of factors. First, the wave of struggles that broke out then showed that the effects of the counter-revolution on working class consciousness had become -- relatively speaking -- inoperative. The ideologies utilized before, during and after World War Two (anti-fascism, patriotism, defence of "the socialist fatherland", the consumer society into which the working class was supposedly integrated) were wearing thin. Moreover, the struggles which reflected this change were not isolated or limited in scope, but had the tendency to generalize in both time and space. Second, the combativity of the international working class seemed again intact. It had the tendency to become massive and open. Both the form and content of the struggle, which tended to break out of capitalist control and submission to an ideology of sacrifice, expressed a significant rejection of any solidarity with the capitalist state.

These global tendencies did not exclude periods of passivity and downturn in the level of consciousness, but they essentially demonstrated a new will and new possibilities for the working class to assert itself as the subject of history.

By contrast, the world wars had occurred in a very different framework: they broke out after a physical and ideological defeat of the working class, a defeat occurring on an international scale, as in the '30's for example; they had required a very active

support by the workers for the projects of the capitalist class.

In reality, the whole idea of the potential contained in the working class struggles of the last two decades has been fundamentally misunderstood. It has either served as a basis for the triumphalism of the ICC or for the opposite tendency, the present rage to see in economic struggles only an innate and insurmountable weakness of the working class, conceived as a simple economic category perpetually integrated by capitalism. The old demons reawaken! The only thing left to do, is to await the moment of sudden economic collapse, which will supposedly rouse the working class. Such a view rejects the dialectical perspective and embraces determinism. It denies the possibility that the working class, despite its objective condition, can become an active factor in social reality, and that there is a dynamic of class consciousness specific to a given historical moment. It's this very dynamic, which has shifted gears in the past twenty years, that seems to evoke a theoretical indifference.

HAS THE HISTORIC COURSE BEEN OVERTUNED?

Today, it is necessary to answer the following questions: has the capitalist class succeeded in stopping the historic course favorable to the working class? Has it obtained a decisive victory? Has it managed to enroll the workers in its campaigns to prepare a Third World War (US against the USSR, US against a new Axis, or ...?)?

We can only respond in the negative. Even if the '80's ended with an undeniable passivity and confusion in the working class, they were also marked by important struggles that continued to testify to the course opened after '68 (the strikes in Poland, movements in '84, '86, '87; it's not a matter here of going back over the form and content of the struggles in the '80's: readers can consult earlier issues of IP on this question). A momentary passivity of the working class does not of itself constitute a reversal of the historic course. Moreover, the fact that a segment of the working class can be mobilized for war (like the Iraqi workers recently) is also not a sufficient condition to constitute a reversal of the historic course. An historic course is determined by the balance of forces between the classes on an international scale.

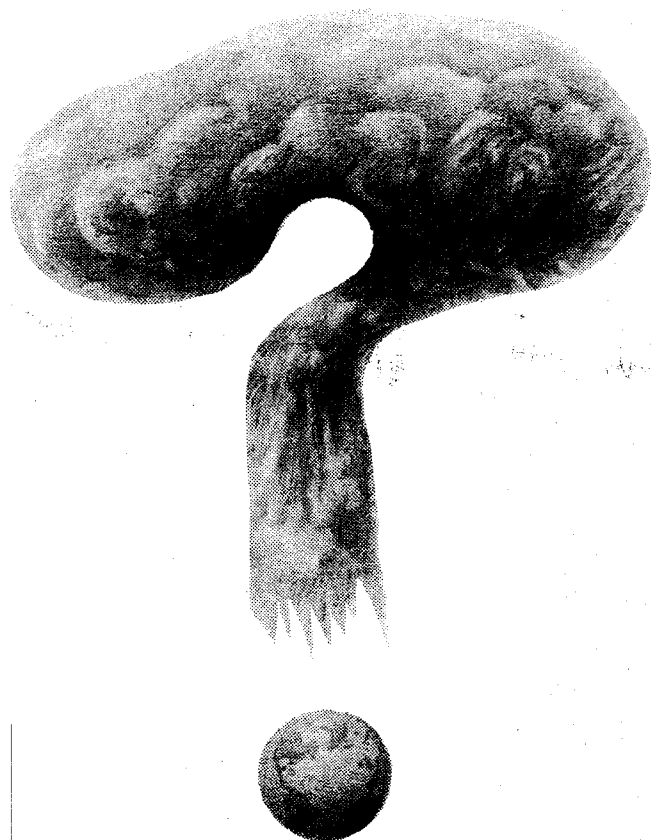
THE GULF WAR AND ITS GENERAL SOCIAL CONTEXT

While we reaffirm the methods tested over the past ten years to judge the historic course, and while we believe that the course has not been reversed, we must still explain how the capitalist class has been capable -- despite an overall course favorable to the working class -- of unleashing a war such as the one in the Gulf.

That war quickly dissipated the pacifist illusions that arose after the fall of the Berlin wall. The problems of the Eastern bloc (themselves linked to the social question and the incapacity of the capitalist class to impose the necessary rate of exploitation on

the workers) or even a hypothetical constitution of new blocs, continue to inscribe capitalism in a global perspective of the AGGRAVATION OF MILITARY TENSIONS. Over the long term, the question of a world conflict remains on the agenda. Moreover, the efforts of the capitalist class everywhere to portray modern warfare as a "clean" clash of technologies (an idea that even Battaglia Comunista swallowed) must not blind us to the horrendous sacrifices which a world war would demand from the working class. The caution and prudence of the capitalist class vis a vis a wider mobilization of the international working class in the Gulf war shows just how great would be the need for a highly mobilized and ideologically totally subjugated class as a prerequisite for a world conflict. The conditions for that do not yet exist today. Since the end of the war, we have seen signs of a certain upsurge in the combativity of the workers (France, Central and Eastern Europe, Canada ...). This demonstrates that the issue is far from being decided in favor of the capitalist class.

However, we cannot deny this paradoxical situation: the crisis of capitalism has spread and deepened (even as the capitalist class has proven capable of postponing a global economic collapse); and yet, the '80's ended with a certain retreat of the working class from the historical stage. We can go even further and assert that there were no spectacular and important advances in working class consciousness in the '80's. The working class is still far from being conscious of its own historical perspective.



But all the dismay and disorientation caused by the Gulf War, the skepticism directed against the working class rather than any intrinsic weakness of the workers themselves, reveal our own difficulties in understanding the period in which we live. The scenario which said :

- that the on-going crisis would automatically and rapidly lead the workers to engage in ever more conscious and united class combats;

- that the opening of a new course in history would also mean the end of ideologies and the end of the bourgeoisie's ability to mystify and disorient workers (for example via "democracy", an ideology that is far from finished);

- that it would be possible to pinpoint the time for the decisive class confrontations that were coming (at the end of the 80's as far as the ICC was concerned);

...this scenario was and is simplistic schematism, unable to grasp social reality in its contradictory dynamic.

For the past ten years, proletarian pressure has remained the expression of a class on the defensive and as such, it has been unable to cast a blow against the bourgeoisie's global preparations for war. On a strictly economic level, all these struggles have ended in defeat for the workers. These struggles have not only failed to paralyze the arm of the capitalist class, they have also, at least up to now, made it harder each time for workers to enter into struggle again. During the Gulf War we didn't see a working class actively mobilized behind the war campaigns of the bourgeoisie, but, on the other hand, we didn't see a working class striking out against the issue of war, either. This kind of reaction will only occur when the economic attacks of the capitalist class are seen as a consequence of war.

Our astonishment that the Gulf War could even take place is very revealing of :

- An overestimation of the possibility of an immediate impact of proletarian struggle on the general tendency towards war that has characterized capitalism since the end of World War II. This idea of an immediate impact is being increasingly theorized by the ICC. Although the historic course remains favorable to the working class, it would be wrong to think that simple resistance struggles, defensive struggles, could have stopped the Gulf War. Although the proletariat was and is an obstacle to a world conflict, it cannot prevent the international bourgeoisie from getting involved in local and regional conflicts.

- An inability to fully grasp the great difficulties facing the working class since the middle of the 80's. These difficulties created an ideological vacuum which the bourgeoisie took advantage of by pumping up its propaganda of democracy and then war mongering.

- All kinds of confusions were created with the notion of the "years of truth" which implied that the bourgeoisie had no more ideological rabbits to pull out of its hat (except for "the left in opposition" whose role was seen in a very schematic way : to break the revolutionary elan of the workers). But, in fact, never before have the right and left wings of the bourgeoisie lied so much as in the last decade! These last years have seen the development of ideologies different from those in use in the 70's but no less pernicious : every time class combativity waned, social decomposition intensified, individualism, competition and alienation grew to epic proportions to counteract the workers' very real efforts at class solidarity. We got "the Reagan message" in the West and the "end of communism and marxism" in the East with the pacifism and democratism manifested at the fall of the Berlin Wall. These mystifications are already wearing thin as struggles in East Germany and elsewhere seem to indicate.

We are expecting too much from the working class in too short a time frame. The "years of truth" were also the time when the proletariat caught it head on with both barrels, both in material terms and ideological terms.

THE EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS ON THE PROLETARIAT IN THE PRESENT PERIOD

In fact, these schematic prognostications were too simplistic and did not take into account the relationship between the crisis of capitalism and the nature of the working class. There was too much of a tendency to keep these two aspects of reality sealed off from each other in separate compartments, an inability to deepen an analysis of their interaction.

The crisis has changed capitalism. It has imposed restructurations on the entire process of accumulation in order to defend the system from its own internal limits. What were the effects of the crisis on the process of production, on the extraction and use of surplus value?

An analysis of the effects of the crisis on the production process and thus, on the proletariat, should not isolate the economy from other factors nor should it seek to develop "new struggle tactics" for the proletariat as

Mouvement Communiste seems to think. Or try to explain the difficulties of the proletariat today by referring to some supposedly different levels of consciousness arising from economic specificities. Our intention should rather be to try to discover the answer to this question : what has become of the proletariat after these two decades of crisis? Although its profound nature as the antagonistic class to capitalism has not changed, although the form and content of its class combat remains fundamentally the same, proletarian class consciousness has undoubtedly been affected by the changes in capitalist exploitation. How?

The capitalist crisis has imposed new contours, new forms, on wage relations. If we don't realize this, we cannot hope to understand the difficulties facing working class combativity and the periods of stagnation and retreat the workers have suffered. It is a pure abstraction to think that the working class can remain unchanged throughout centuries of bourgeois rule, wearing out one bourgeois mystifications after another until the whole house of cards collapses. What this ignores is that changes in the structure of the working class leave loopholes and possibilities for new mystifications of the capitalist class.

One of the first consequences of this process of transformation is, for example, a complete change in the whole notion of productive and unproductive labor (see articles on this subject by GS and ML in IP# 15). In the 19th century, the proletariat was defined as industrial workers but this has changed as the development of state capitalism has broadened the concept of the working class. There is an unfortunate tendency in the revolutionary milieu to exclude unproductive workers from the proletariat. In reality, we need to BROADEN the notion of the proletariat, even though this reality has made things more difficult for the working class. The new way of managing surplus value that is at the heart of state capitalism has complicated things considerably for the proletariat.

On the other hand, the reality of the crisis, the need to counteract the decline in the rate of profit, to increase productivity, has resulted in frontal attacks against the working class (directly against wages or indirectly through attacks on social services and/or massive lay-offs with few industrial sectors remaining stable).

These attacks on the living and working conditions of the working class have had a tendency to make conditions more homogeneous in the working class as a whole. But counter-tendencies have also appeared as consequences of the crisis and these countervailing trends have diversified the proletarian condition,

altered the composition of the proletariat as we knew it in the seventies. The working class has always gone through changes in the history of capitalism but changes have accelerated in the last ten years :

- The first counter-tendency was the result of an evolution in the role of state intervention in the economic process; it produced divisions in the working class that have not yet been overcome. Weakened by decades of "economic recovery", the state has tried to fight against the crisis by getting rid of a whole series of tasks that risk paralyzing it : dismantling unprofitable subsidized sectors, disengaging from certain forms of state management of labor power which it had been responsible for since World War II (dismantling state welfare services, social services, etc) and attacking the living standards of the part of the proletariat directly under its control (civil service workers, teachers, etc).

This definitive restructuration was accompanied by singing the praises of "privatization", thereby introducing or accentuating differences among proletarians who work for the State and those who work for private industry. In the private sector, workers were led to believe that their wages were linked to their individual performance, their productivity, their "involvement" in the firm, thereby reducing combativity. Even though the public sector workers fought long and hard, the link between what was happening to them and what was happening to workers in the private sector remained vague to many workers.

- A whole series of sectors where workers had been in the forefront of class struggle in the 70's, were almost completely dismantled in the 80's or reduced to a minor role : in the mines, steel, textiles, ship building, etc. What has become of these workers who were the fer de lance of class struggle? What has become of the consciousness their struggles were able to develop?

Most of them have joined the swollen ranks of the unemployed. But the State's ability (which we underestimated) to "manage" this aspect of the crisis and deflect the anger of the unemployed with "conversion" and "training" programs, with early retirement packages, with a guaranteed minimal dole (as in France), has meant that unemployment has not been a factor of radicalization as we predicted. Unemployment has marginalized and atomized a whole section of the working class that lives a precarious life of odd jobs at best and plain misery at worst and whose experience of struggle does not seem to have enriched the consciousness

of the class as a whole up to now.

The "new generation" of young unemployed workers have poured their revolt and disgust into dead-end rioting. The link between this potential part of the working class, ejected from production before it can begin, and the rest of the class has not been made. In fact, the link is often successfully (at least for the moment) hidden by the use of nationalistic and religious mystifications centered around immigration.

- Under pressure from the crisis and competition, the concentration of capital has continued. But as far as production is concerned, what we see is the opposite phenomenon, a dispersal of factories, a reduction in their size and a corresponding reduction in the concentration of workers. The 80's have seen the development of much smaller production units and of contracting work out. The huge assembly-line factories have found better days in countries on the periphery of capitalism where workers are still susceptible to mystifications such as unionism. The creation of new jobs has mainly taken place in the new and smaller plants and in sectors directly linked to the management of capital like insurance and banks. These new conditions have influenced the way the workers see themselves and the way they conceive of class solidarity.

- The need to increase the productivity of labor has, among other causes, led to the growth of automation in the factories. Production in the 80's and 90's is not like production in the 60's and 70's. The relationship of the worker to "his" work has fundamentally changed. Of course, this is a fundamental tendency in the capitalist system; work has been transformed all through the history of capitalism. But this present transformation has been extremely rapid and this must have had an effect on the consciousness of the working class, both those directly involved and the others. The need for greater competence, a greater "sense of responsibility" within the firm cannot but have helped to counteract the apathy and disinterest productive labor inspired in the 60's and 70's. At the same time, in reality, this development of automation demands that the proletariat be even more subject to the logic of production and the alienation of the capitalist system.

- Another effect of the crisis and one that has produced a great fragmentation of the working class in the 80's has been the universal growth of part-time work. This has led to great feelings of insecurity, to a feeling for the need for "individual solutions" among these workers. This has undoubtedly contributed to making them feel different from those

workers who still have some (relative) stability in their work and wages. This perceived separation has probably, along with all the other factors mentioned above, weakened the development of class consciousness and made proletarian combat more difficult.

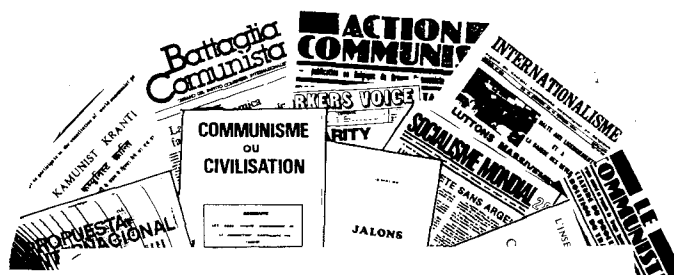
It is true that any of these factors taken alone would not be enough to explain all the difficulties of the working class today. But taken together, we can see how today's situation demands ever greater efforts by the proletariat to see itself as one whole united class and to generalize its struggles across the board. The crisis has not only reduced its standard of living, it has upset the whole framework of its struggles. It has shaken the objective terrain of its coming to consciousness.

CONCLUSION

The fact that the Gulf War broke out does not indicate a change in the historic course. The future lies with major class confrontations that will determine the choice between socialism or barbarism. Today when the bourgeoisie is attempting to strengthen its mystifications and increase its ideological hold on the working class, it talks a lot about the end of communism and the death of marxism, falsifying these concepts by identifying them with totalitarianism. There is no denying that the situation is very dangerous for the proletariat. Although the historic course remains in its favor to the extent that the combativity of the workers has not been destroyed, this positive outcome is by no means a predetermined, mechanistic, fatalistic certainty. There never were any guarantees for the working class and today less than ever before. If the workers, as the only class historically able to end the present barbarism, can not put forward their own class perspectives in the coming years, society will inexorably begin the march towards generalized world conflict.



THE REVOLUTIONARY MILIEU



For a Living Practice of Marxist Theory

Now that we have seen how the world economic crisis has shaken the Soviet bloc to its foundations, changed the inter-imperialist game plan, condemned whole areas of the third world to starvation, disease and war, can there be much doubt among revolutionaries that the present recession in the west is just the tip of the iceberg, a small indication of the deep damage this crisis is causing at the heart of the capitalist system as well as on the periphery? Can there be much doubt that the tremendous destructive force of the convulsions of the profit system are far from over and that if the workers do not end capitalism, it will end mankind?

The media apologists for the system suggest that the Russian bloc has suffered its recent setbacks because stalinism was a "different economic system" and that capitalism will now be able to save the east. They claim that the eastern bloc countries were too oppressive to survive in this wonderful world of "democracy triumphant". Some even tell us that imperialist rivalry between the U.S. bloc and the Russian bloc is a thing of the past. Oh, brave new world!

Where in all this maelstrom of words and images is the authentic voice of revolutionaries, those who proclaim that there will be no peace and no life without an end to capitalism? The truth is that revolutionaries are a tiny handful today, a voice in the wilderness. But this is not the whole truth. If masses were listening, it would not change the tragedy of the milieu; perhaps it would only deepen it. Most of the revolutionary milieu has little or nothing of any relevance to say that makes much sense in the light of today's events.

It's bad enough that no one in the revolutionary milieu foresaw these events;

few seem to be able to even deal with them coherently even as they are happening. Although Paul Mattick claimed in 1969 that marxism cannot be a predictive science as far as specific events are concerned, it seems clear that marxism should be able to provide us with a general direction and framework for the evolution of society. And it can. The fault is not in our stars but in ourselves, in the crude and inadequate way our generation of revolutionaries has undertaken theoretical work even when (and this is a big "if") militants could bring themselves to see that it isn't enough to simply repeat the insights or class lines of the past -- or worse, reduce the "acquisitions of the past" to dogmas and eternal verities.

Although some revolutionaries (and we among them) have tried very hard to explain that the economic system in both blocs was and is state capitalism albeit with different juridical forms, this is still not a widely accepted analysis in the revolutionary milieu. Indeed, recent moves towards "privatization" in the west and east have led some in the revolutionary movement to conclude that the era of state capitalism is over and that perhaps the system has found a way to make itself healthy again. Parts of the revolutionary milieu have still never really made up their minds if the worldwide economic crisis really exists or not. State capitalism as a military-political economic tendency is not accepted by many in the milieu who continue to see power blocs as the result of mere economic rivalry alone, as though the modern world of high stakes nuclear imperialism were a simple replay of the "ententes" of World War I.

It should be clear to workers all over the world that capitalism in the west cannot save even the west from unemploy-

ment, economic crisis, and social decay much less the still less competitive economies of the east. That's what all the din of the media and the electoral circus in the east is supposed to mask. But what is much less clear is what revolutionary marxism has to say in all this.

The crisis in marxism is not the result of seeing Lenin's statues tumble into the dust in the eastern bloc. The real crisis is the result of the theoretical bankruptcy of much of what passes for marxist thought among genuine revolutionaries, the result of decades of political confusion, sectarianism, and fossilization.

That stalinism and "marxist-leninism" could for so long be identified with marxist revolution is primarily the result of the profound counter-revolution that overtook the exhausted working class movement after the failure of the revolutionary wave in the 20's. But who will deny that the insane cretinism of the revolutionary milieu has not contributed to this : all the party-vanguardists and those on their knees 70 years after the Russian Revolution still proclaiming it a model for the future revolution. The counter-revolution put Lenin himself in mothballs in a mausoleum but the milieu deified his writings until Lenin's works became holy writ.

The left communist movement of the 20's, warned against the limitations of the Russian experiment, the dangers of partyism, the nonsense of seeing anything but a form of state capitalism in the Russian economy. But it was never able to complete its theoretical tasks, never able to unite and present a real alternative to the dying working-class movement, never able to throw off the heavy weight of the degeneration of the Communist International and of Lenin's ambiguous legacy. The left communist movement ended in caricature : the fossilized vanguardists (with or without their original gurus) on the one hand, and the fossilized councilists on the other, who for fear of leninism reduced political organization and thought to a nullity. That both substitutionism and councilism end up back in unionism, activism and even sympathy for nationalism and national liberation movements should not be a surprise. If marxist theory does not go forward to encompass the new conditions of struggle, it cannot tread water for half a century and rest on its "laurels"; it will go backwards and degenerate.

Recent events will only exacerbate the dislocation and demoralization in the present milieu. Much of the demoralization is justified because it serves no purpose today for the working class to have to listen to purported revolutionaries who still cannot bring themselves

to cut the umbilical cord with the Russian experience or who keep talking about the needs of class struggle today as though we were still in 1905 -- the "spread the strike" (and all will be well) mantra. Much of the dislocation is inevitable because there are too many who mistake their stubborn fossilization for some kind of principled intransigence, when in fact it is precisely real principles that are lacking; those who see doubt as a weakness, questioning as a threat and theoretical work as a matter of fidelity to an inherited liturgy.

We have written about the crisis in the revolutionary milieu many times before but so we would like to devote this brief article to two different reactions to this dislocation : one is immobilism and the other is regroupment woes.

IMMOBILISM or "OUTSIDE THE ORGANIZATION THERE IS NO SALVATION"

One of the most obvious examples of immobilism in the face of recent events is the ICC. Although the ICC began with an awareness of the failure of the past movements, it lost confidence in itself and in the pace of the struggle and retreated into a glorification of the past, of substitutionism, of "building the organization", "protecting the organization" and "managing the organization". It is one of the best examples, but by no means the only example, of an organization bent on "treading water" in the face of change; clinging to past glories and orthodoxy in a vain attempt to safeguard the facade.

Militants in such organizations are usually not as blind to reality as they might seem but perhaps console themselves with the notion that "at least they are still doing something", that they are avoiding "death" on the outside (the "death" of capitulating to bourgeois ideology as soon as the props of organization are removed? the "death" of isolation, as though the revolutionary milieu were limited to one group or another? the "death" of one's previous efforts and aspirations?). In fact, this sort of thinking is totally wrong. Staying in degenerating organizations is not "doing something" -- it is turning your back on the real tasks of revolutionaries today. The death from stultification is on the inside of the ICC, not the outside.

The ICC has so little discussion of any sort any more that militants are unused to even confronting ideas. Too dangerous, too apt to bring anathemas down on your head, make trouble. Consequently militants have a built-in self-interest in thinking the ICC's positions on recent events are "really good". How else can one explain the inanity of the ICC's position on the collapse of both blocs

and capitalism being supplanted by "social decomposition"? Or the fact that this goes almost unchallenged by even the rarest peep of dissent? How can marxist revolutionaries possibly work towards any sort of theoretical clarity if they work in an atmosphere of cowardly manipulation, personal pressure, and bureaucratic discipline to punish dissent? What intellectual and moral leadership can ever emerge either from the ranting and raving invective or from those who shut their eyes and pretend that they just don't see. It makes a mockery of principles, ideals, and socialism itself.

Staying in a degenerating organization like the ICC means cutting yourself off from the possibility of facing and eventually overcoming the crisis of marxism. Present world events can have a healthy effect if their impact jolts revolutionaries into a re-evaluation of marxist theory. Hiding from the storm in a supposedly nice, safe little niche will only condemn a militant to sterility -- and worse, to becoming a caricature of a revolutionary, someone who has a voice loud enough to yell slogans through a bullhorn at workers but who cannot face the little bully boys on his own turf.

All this is covered over with a thin veneer of respectability by a new dogma the ICC conveniently invented 6 or 7 years ago : that militants supposedly have to stay in an organization until it has crossed the class line to the capitalist class enemy. Prisoners for life. Like battered women who pathetically claim that "he loves me", the militants of the ICC have discovered the sanctity of marriage.

When the Italian fraction in exile voted to return to Italy after World War II and to join the party that Bordiga had formed in their absence, some comrades of the fraction (those who would soon form Internationalisme, the precursor of the ICC) wanted to continue the theoretical development they had begun during the war when the watchful eye of bordigist orthodoxy was presumably weakened. Bordiga's party, however, refused to accept anyone as a faction in its midst or to undertake theoretical re-evaluation. Everyone else in the ex-Bilan group agreed to play by these new (and unprincipled) rules except the future comrades of Internationalisme. They refused the "loyalty oath" to the new organization of Bordiga and they had no intention of accepting Bordiga's ultimatum. They had no such idea that they were "obligated" to stay in the bordigist party "until class betrayal". If they had followed such a notion, they never would have developed the coherent positions that were to become the basis of the ICC. The positions on the unions, state capitalism, the period of transition, the party and its tasks were yet to be elabo-

rated and published in a clearly defined way. And if these comrades had submitted to organizational discipline and group pressure, if they had "counted numbers", gone for the safe bet, they never would have worked out these positions.

The bordigist organization at the time did not feel that even world war justified a rethinking of marxism; they were content to pick up where they had left off in the 30's. They took refuge in organization-building for the PCI and fell victims to theoretical regression. Internationalisme denounced them, not as class enemies, but as a caricature of a real party, as an organization where Bordiga spoke and "les negres" (their name for his lieutenants) chewed it up and spit it out so the others could "assimilate" it. Meetings held no discussions, only speeches. Internationalisme predicted that this stultification would eventually lead to class betrayal and they didn't sit around participating in that organizational charade for 20 years. It was ultimately Internationalisme's theoretical work (including the rediscovery of the legacy of the German and Dutch left communist movement), and not all the super-smug "orthodoxy" of the PCI, that was the bridge to the future developments in marxism in the generation of '68. This new dictum of "stay where you are until you are brain dead" is another self-serving invention of the latter-day ICC. Too bad that at least one of the former comrades of Internationalisme, MC, lived long enough to betray his better days, with paeons to the very immobility, organizational manipulation and mediocrity he once fought against with such audacity and depth.

There is an urgent need for a renewal of marxism, an effort to address the major issues of our time as we realize that we have already seen almost a century of capitalist decadence. And there is life out there in the revolutionary milieu : recent events have led to discussions and debate, certainly more real debate outside organizations like the ICC than ever inside them. There have been open meetings among groups and individuals where ideas are really exchanged (see I.P.#18 & 19)). Of course the participants are aware of the limitations of these meetings : after so many years of fragmentation and silence, it is hard to find a voice and a coherence in so many disparate preoccupations. But for anyone who can see beyond the appearance of things, who can understand the importance of questions rather than glib answers, who can see this searching and stumbling as an unavoidable passage, these meetings are infinitely preferable to the ritual harrangues of ICC public meetings. Opening the pages of our magazines to debate as we have done and the CBG and now the CWO wishes to do, to encourage collective

thought and confrontation of ideas -- this is the task of revolutionaries today and although it may seem but a small thing compared with the phony certitudes of a degenerating organization, although it involves risks and the danger of losses, it alone offers any hope.

REGROUPMENT or "TAKE ME, I'M YOURS"

The other response to the turmoil created by recent events is a renewed interest in regroupment of revolutionaries. Insofar as this regroupment process is part of the already mentioned efforts at debate and confrontation of ideas in the revolutionary milieu, this movement towards regroupment is both necessary and positive. What better way to avoid the fragmentation of recent years; what better way to protect the energies of revolutionary elements who risk getting lost in the shuffle.

But formal regroupment of revolutionary organizations is not exactly the same thing as discussion and cooperation. It is usually the result of a process of discussion and cooperation and not a precondition for it. We all know that regroupment cannot be an ersatz thing, born of desperation and not knowing what else to do. We've seen too many of these fly-by-night unions go down the drain after one or two issues of eclectic and confusing magazines or one or two activist campaigns.

In general, regroupment would appear to flourish in periods of rising class struggle but it also requires theoretical clarity and maturity. This is usually brought about because of pressure from events of such importance that previous dithering or confusion in major sectors of the workers' movement is overcome. It can only be hoped that recent events will have so jolted the consciousness of those of us who still speak of working class revolution that we will be able to work together towards greater clarity as we regroup. But it is not certain when this will be the case or what will be left of the milieu as we know it today. Regroupment is, in any case, the result of a process in objective conditions and in the consciousness of revolutionaries.

In its recent issue, the CBG has written what amounts to an open letter to us asking why we are tarrying so long before going to the altar. Why, they ask, is I.P. taking so long to regroup with the CBG when I.P. is supposedly the champion of the need for regroupment. Could it be that I.P. is just a bunch of hypocrites? Or is it still a question of remembrance of things past when some of us were on opposite sides of particularly nasty doings years ago in the ICC? The CBG wants to know "what are the obstacles to re-

groupment between I.P. and the CBG". Are we really serious about regroupment, they ask.

Reports of joint C.B.G./I.P. public meetings and of discussion sessions between our two groups have appeared in the pages of our magazine and in the C.B.G.. When we began discussions with the CBG, we saw it as a group capable of depth in its analyses, a group that was in touch with reality and not off on a sectarian binge. We saw a group open to debate and wrongly still ostracised in the milieu. Today, we continue to see the CBG in this positive light.

That is why over the last two years our comrades have repeatedly traveled to the U.K. for meetings with the CBG. We also invited a delegate from the CBG to come to our yearly international meeting to participate fully in all sessions; the CBG took us up on this recently. If "the proof of the pudding is in the eating" as Marx liked to say, I.P. has certainly (figuratively) "put its money where its mouth is" as far as the importance of regroupment and the CBG is concerned. We are still planning open meetings and discussion meetings together and willing to devote all the time and energy we can to make this work.

But...the CBG writes, perhaps I.P. doesn't want regroupment because it demands unanimity in political positions like the ICC.

Let us put these fears to rest, too. We are altogether adamant about refusing monolithism of any sort. The debates and disagreements in the pages of our press are testimony not only to internal disagreements but to our willingness to publish them to the world. In fact, this is a principle with us, not an empty abstraction but a principle we actively put into practice for all to see: our recent debates on the events in the eastern bloc, disagreements on the role of accident in history, differences on the period of transition, etc. We do this because we are convinced that revolutionary theory can only be served by the most thorough-going analysis and debate. Even if we were indeed the stupidist militants in the milieu, we still would have learned an indelible lesson from our experience of being expelled by the ICC. We, like the CBG, learned what it was to have organizational discipline be used to punish disagreement and to have the need for taking positions be used not only to end debate but even to preclude discussion. And we also learned to re-evaluate our own role in helping to stifle discussions when we were in the ICC in the past.

So what are the issues that still have to be dealt with between our two organiza-

tions? One issue concerns how we see our task as a revolutionary group today and the other has to do the functioning of such a group.

OUR TASKS

When the CBG saw the emergence of IP, they realized that both our groups claim allegiance to the old platform of the ICC. This is a significant point because although a good part of the revolutionary milieu today either came directly from the ICC or spent some time in or around it (the GCI and splits in Belgium, the old PIC group in France, the CBG and the CWO in the UK, etc) few now claim a connection to the ICC's platform. Even the ICC has abandoned its own principles. The CBG, therefore, concluded that there was no reason why the CBG and IP shouldn't regroup as soon as possible after clearing up old scores. The class lines are all that is needed and they were already there, gleaned from the past; anything else would be considered open questions. Thus, to the CBG, either IP thinks the platform is enough and therefore regroupment can happen right away or if regroupment does not happen right away, then IP is, in fact, rejecting any idea of open questions.

This is exactly the sort of "either/or" logic and the inability of IP to decipher it that has made for such misunderstanding between our two groups.

IP does not think that the old ICC platform is enough to determine an understanding of revolutionary activity today. We have repeatedly written and said this. To us, the crisis in the revolutionary milieu is not due to sectarianism (as the CBG has claimed) or other organizational issues but to a profound political regression. Regrouping again today on the simple basis of the ICC regroupment 20 years ago is doomed to failure.

If agreement on class lines is only a part of what has to be done, then what is the rest?

Well, we don't have a "new and improved" platform all ready to pull out of a hat, a new litmus test to tie up all the loose ends. When IP wrote in a previous issue that there must be agreement on the process needed for a renaissance of marxism, the CBG seems to have interpreted that to mean that we demand agreement on what would constitute a renewal of marxism. But this is impossible! How can we demand agreement on what does not exist. Discussions have barely begun on this either in the milieu or in IP.

What we must agree on is not the conclusions of the process but on the need for the process itself; agreement not on the positions developed but on the need and the commitment to develop them.

It is clear that our concern as an organization, the orientation for our activity is to continue to develop our positions on the current situation, the evolution of state capitalism (formal and

real domination of capital; changes in the capitalist class and the working class), the development of class consciousness and the implications of all these changes on the unfolding of class struggle today. The work on these points and their interconnectedness has been the specific contribution of our group; it is what we represent in the milieu.

Other militants in the milieu have, quite legitimately, other concerns and other orientations. Do the CBG and IP have the same idea of their tasks? This can only be answered by looking at articles, position papers, and texts by the comrades of the CBG on these points. The fact that such documents do not exist, that the CBG is not yet a contributor to these questions, only shows that more work remains to be done before it is clear that our groups share a common orientation for activity.

FUNCTIONING

Many times it seems to us that despite all the efforts we have made, our work seems pitifully inadequate. Why talk so much about the "process of the renaissance of marxism"? Why doesn't IP just do it and stop making all this fuss.

In fact, any advances in theory depend on a collective process. You can't just say, "sure, we'd all like a renaissance of marxism" and wait around for something to happen. Planning, organization of time and resources, a way of functioning together in theory and practice has to be worked out, for open meetings in the milieu, for discussions in magazines and all the more so for regroupment. If political discussion is a priority, then it is natural that comrades pay great attention to the form and content of reasonings and arguments. The reaction to this kind of "nit-picking" can sometimes be defensiveness rather than understanding. Can polemics be carried on within an organization without degenerating along personal or localist lines? Are we committed to having everyone participate rather than one poor slob writing most of the articles? How do we organize a magazine that appears in two languages on two continents and still make sure that the articles are a collective emanation that everyone reads (but doesn't necessarily have to agree with) before they appear? We still haven't solved this. Before this last issue, the CBG did not publish an issue for 2 years. Why is that? How do we contemplate meshing an organizational practice?

We certainly do not want to engage the CBG in a discussion here about whether political groups have to take positions or not. This debate is almost too byzantine to deal with but it seems that the CBG has modified its rejection of "taking positions" by maintaining that it is possible for organizations to adopt "orientations" on the current situation.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

OUR POSITIONS

The external Fraction of the International Communist Current claims a continuity with the programmatic framework developed by the ICC before its degeneration. This programmatic framework is itself based on the successive historical contribution of the Communist League, of the I, II and III Internationals and of the Left Fractions which detached themselves from the latter, in particular the German, Dutch and Italian Left Communists. After being de facto excluded from the ICC following the struggle that it waged against the political and organizational degeneration of that Current, the Fraction now continues its work of developing revolutionary consciousness outside the organizational framework of the ICC.

The Fraction defends the following basic principles, fundamental lessons of the class struggle :

Since World War I, capitalism has been a decadent social system which has nothing to offer the working class and humanity as a whole except cycles of crises, war and reconstruction. Its irreversible historical decay poses a single choice for humanity : either socialism or barbarism.

The working class is the only class able to carry out the communist revolution against capitalism.

The revolutionary struggle of the proletariat must lead to a general confrontation with the capitalist state. Its class violence is carried out in the mass action of revolutionary transformation. The practice of terror and terrorism, which expresses the blind violence of the state and of the desperate petty-bourgeoisie respectively, is alien to the proletariat.

In destroying the capitalist state, the working class must establish the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale, as a transition to communist society. The form that this dictatorship will take is the international power of the Workers' Councils.

Communism or socialism means neither "self-management" nor "nationalization". It requires the conscious abolition by the proletariat of capitalist social relations and institutions such as wage-labor, commodity production, national frontiers, class divisions and the state apparatus, and is based on a unified world human community.

The so-called "socialist countries" (Russia, the Eastern bloc, China, Cuba, etc.) are a particular expression of the universal tendency to state capitalism, itself an expression of the decay of capitalism. There are no "socialist countries"; these are just so many capitalist bastions that the proletariat must destroy like any other capitalist state.

In this epoch, the trade unions everywhere are organs of capitalist discipline within the proletariat. Any policy based on working in the unions, whether to preserve or "transform" them, only serves to

subject the working class to the capitalist state and to divert it from its own necessary self-organization.

In decadent capitalism, parliaments and elections are nothing but sources of bourgeois mystification. Any participation in the electoral circus can only strengthen this mystification in the eyes of the workers.

The so-called "workers" parties, "Socialist" and "Communist", as well as their extreme left appendages, are the left face of the political apparatus of capital.

Today all factions of the bourgeoisie are equally reactionary. Any tactics calling for "Popular Fronts", "Anti-Fascist Fronts" or "United Fronts" between the proletariat and any faction of the bourgeoisie can only serve to derail the struggle of the proletariat and disarm it in the face of the class enemy.

So-called "national liberation struggles" are moments in the deadly struggle between imperialist powers large and small to gain control over the world market. The slogan of "support for people in struggle" amounts, in fact, to defending one imperialist power against another under nationalist or "socialist" verbiage.

The victory of the revolution requires the organization of revolutionaries into a party. The role of a party is neither to "organize the working class" nor to "take power in the name of the workers", but through its active intervention to develop the class consciousness of the proletariat.

ACTIVITY OF THE FRACTION

In the present period characterized by a general rise in the class struggle and at the same time by a weakness on the part of revolutionary organizations and the degeneration of the pole of regroupment represented by the ICC, the Fraction has as its task to conscientiously take on the two functions which are basic to revolutionary organizations:

1) The development of revolutionary theory on the basis of the historic acquisitions and experiences of the proletariat, so as to transcend the contradictions of the Communist Lefts and of the present revolutionary milieu, in particular on the questions of class consciousness, the role of the party and the conditions imposed by state capitalism.

2) Intervention in the class struggle on an international scale, so as to be a catalyst in the process which develops in workers' struggles towards consciousness, organization and the generalized revolutionary action of the proletariat.

The capacity to form a real class party in the future depends on the accomplishment of these tasks by the present revolutionary forces. This requires, on their part, the will to undertake a real clarification and open confrontation of communist positions by rejecting all monolithism and sectarianism.